

And the 2000 GPN/Nexus  
Scholarship Winner is..

# SARAH M<sup>C</sup>QUEEN Sarah



Sarah McQueen, shown above and at left with her academic advisor, John Biernbaum, wants to get out into the hort market when she graduates in May. "I look forward to actually applying what I've learned," said Sarah.



Sarah, a senior at Michigan State University, believes you get out of life only what you put in. This honor student, three-time horticulture intern and member of MSU's hort club should expect quite a bit.

Sarah McQueen owes a lot to her teachers. It was her freshman biology teacher, Ms. Carol Walksler, who first introduced Sarah to the world of horticulture and gave her the opportunity to work in the school's greenhouse. It was her college advisor at Michigan State University, Dr. John Biernbaum, who helped Sarah nurture her love of plants and gain practical hort experience through several summer internships.

But it was Sarah's own desire, determination and hard work that earned her the 2000 GPN /Nexus Intern Scholarship Award.

Sarah, who was a finalist in last year's scholarship competition, was selected as the 2000 winner from a pool of finalists because of the quality and caliber of her internship and her ability to articulate in essay form what she gained from that internship (see excerpts from Sarah's essay on pg. 17).

A senior at Michigan State University, Sarah is a horticulture major with an emphasis in floriculture and a specialization in agribusiness. Sarah's three-month summer internship at Andy Mast Greenhouse, Grand Rapids, Mich., was the third internship Sarah has completed during her three and a half years at MSU.

"I think it's extremely important to have as clear a view as possible of the career you're planning before you actually go out there and look for a job," said Sarah.

"There's no other way to know whether or not it will be what you imagined. Working as an intern at Andy Mast's gave me a realistic taste of what I might expect as a grower."

Sarah's hard work has allowed her to get a "taste" of many areas of the horticulture market. The summer after her freshman year, Sarah

interned with Ball FloraPlant in West Chicago. Sarah worked in vegetative production, spending time in Ball's marketing greenhouses where new products are developed and produced for bench and field trials.

She also spent time working in the clean stock certification greenhouses, implementing sanitation and IPM procedures to ensure a disease-free stock plant base.

Sarah continued her work with Ball the summer after her sophomore year. As the field trials intern at Ball, Sarah spent her summer focused on marketing, container gardening and landscape design and maintenance.

"I dealt with a huge variety of plants that summer," said Sarah. "One of the best parts of that internship was my opportunity to work with people in many departments of Ball to coordinate displays in the trial grounds. I was also able to interact with customers and visitors to the trial grounds."

But since Sarah's goal after graduation was to begin working as a grower in a medium- to large-sized wholesale or retail greenhouse, she continued her search for the perfect internship. That's when she found Andy Mast.

"Working at Andy Mast's was great," said Sarah. "It was my first experience at a large wholesale production greenhouse. So when I found that I still enjoyed the work even when it meant weeks of packing geraniums, it was just additional confirmation that I wanted to work in a greenhouse."

Kris Tweedy, general manager at Andy Mast and Sarah's internship supervisor, tried to give

Sarah as many different opportunities during her internship as the season would allow.

"Sarah participated in fertility monitoring and planning as well as insect and disease scouting and control," said Tweedy. "She participated in all aspects of poinsettia propagation as well as outdoor lily production."

While Sarah gained practical experience at Andy Mast, she also had a "realistic" experience. Tweedy didn't shy away from assigning Sarah tedious jobs or hard work because she



Sarah and Biernbaum work together as part of the MSU Hort Club. (All photos courtesy of Jake Biernbaum, Haslett, Mich.)

was an intern. If it was a job for the grower, it was a job for Sarah.

"We even had Sarah share weekend duties so that she would experience having responsibility for the entire greenhouse environment," said Tweedy.

Each weekend Sarah or another assistant grower was responsible for watering and fertilizing, adjusting mist intervals, closing shade curtains and generally overseeing all the greenhouse functions.

But Sarah welcomed the opportunity to work and learn in Andy Mast's 250,000 sq. ft. of production space.

"The biggest effect my internship had on me is that I have a much greater appreciation for what being a head grower entails," said Sarah, "and it's a lot more than just what I learned in school."

#### INTERNS TO THE RESCUE

Horticulture educators and industry leaders often talk about the "crisis" in the marketplace: a lack of qualified students who will become the future growers, breeders and researchers for the floriculture industry.

But an increase in scholarship monies and internship programs is attracting a new crop of young, bright, motivated students to the horticulture profession. This surge in talent promises to benefit students, growers and the industry itself.

The GPN/Nexus \$3,000 scholarship award is designed to recognize and encourage these horticulture internship programs by honoring those students who take advantage of them. And as the value of internships is recognized, more and more industry associations, greenhouse operations, seed companies and universities are getting in on the act.

The horticulture department at MSU began

requiring internships more than six years ago. The school even mandates that all freshman hort students take a one-credit class their first semester to help them prepare for an internship. Students that have completed an internship are then required to make an oral presentation to the incoming freshman.

"Perhaps the greatest benefit of an internship is the maturing effect it has on the student," said Biernbaum, who teaches greenhouse structures and operation and floriculture crop production at MSU. "Students are different after an internship. They gain confidence. And they often come back to school with a little more pride and respect for our program, because in most cases it is obvious that the growers respect and value the instructors and our program."

Andy Mast Greenhouse has long worked with MSU to provide internships, although they have had interns from other schools in the past.

According to Biernbaum, Sarah talked early in the school year about an internship in Grand Rapids.

"I provided her with a list of contacts I had from previous interns, but Sarah did all the work. She made the contact, met with the growers and decided which operation would be best for her," said Biernbaum.

#### GETTING OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN

Sarah will graduate in May of this year but hasn't yet decided whether she will continue her

education or enter the job market.

"I'm not going to totally rule out anything, but I'd like to get out and work a couple of years to gain more experience in the field before I think about going back to school," said Sarah.

Whichever road she chooses, Biernbaum is confident Sarah will succeed.

"In addition to being a horticulture student, Sarah is also a member of the MSU Honors College, which puts her in a small group of outstanding students," said Biernbaum. "Another key that sets Sarah apart is that she has done the real work, gone out and gotten some experience which has given her more confidence than most."

Sarah says she just feels lucky to have been given the opportunities to pursue her goals, both in the classroom and in the field.

"I think I received a superior education at MSU, but I also believe that you get out of your education what you put into it. I got involved with the Horticulture Club at school, and I did three internships, not just the one required," said Sarah. "I look forward to the challenge of going out into the workplace and actually applying what I've learned."

And Sarah may already have a job waiting for her. Tweedy told GPN that Andy Mast's would "love to have Sarah on board."

"Sarah had an inquisitive nature and a quick mind. She could see things with a grower's questioning nature," said Tweedy. "She gives me hope for the future crop of growers out there."

Beth Meneghini is editor of GPN.

### Saluting the Finalists

The process of selecting a "winner" for the 2000 scholarship award from the pool of excellent applicants was difficult at best. The good news is the number of motivated and creative hort students from across the country, along with dedicated professors and participating greenhouse operations that responded to the call for entries.

The GPN staff salutes each and every student who took the time to submit an essay. We simply don't have the room to include them all, but one finalist in particular stood out.

#### Jennifer Roll

Jennifer Roll, a senior environmental horticulture major at the University of Florida, spent last summer in Gilroy, Calif., learning first hand what it takes to breed quality plants at Goldsmith Seeds.

After several years of undergraduate study in molecular biology, biotechnology and floriculture, Jennifer decided to leave the lab and get some experience in the field.

"It is difficult to find a thriving breeding program in most universities," said Jennifer. "My internship allowed me not only to learn about the research at Goldsmith but to actually be involved in the process and eventually take on a co-worker role."

During her three-month experience, Jennifer assisted breeders with selections, set-up hybrid trials, took experimental field trial and germination data and evaluated a new crop for breeding potential.

Perhaps most importantly, the internship may have helped the senior find a career path she may otherwise have missed.

"Coming into Goldsmith with my knowledge of molecular research, and then learning more about breeding, showed me that these two areas can actually apply to one another," said Jennifer. "I believe great things can be accomplished by joining these two areas of research, and it is a